NEW BOOKS.

A Russian Estimate of Tolstoi and Dostoievski.

It will be generally admitted that no living Russian is better qualified than is DMITRI MEREJKOWSKI, the author of "The Death of the Gods," to discuss the two greatest Russian novelists since Turgeniev, and for that reason we are indebted to the translator of the book entitled "Tolstoi as Man and Artist," which includes an essay on Dostoievski (Putnam's). The author begins with pointing out that, in the case of both Tolstoi and Dostoievski, their works are so bound up with their lives, with the personality of each writer, that, before studying them as artists or thinkers, it is indispensable to learn what manner of men they were. The two novelists started on very different social planes. Tolstoi was the descendant on his mother's side of the Grand Duke St. Michael of Chernigov, and on his father's of Peter Andreivich Tolstoi, the favorite of Peter the Great, the Chief of the Secret Chancery and a tutor to the Czarevich Alexei. Dostoievski, on the other hand, was the son of a staff-surgeon and a tradesman's daughter, born in a charity hospital at Moscow. His first impressions were of penury and his whole life was spent in poverty until just before the end. Tolstoi early achieved literary distinction, and has always since been famous. Dostoievski's first novel, "Poor Folk," was successful, but his next story, "The Double," was a failure, and thenceforth, although he was to produce such a masterpiece as "Crime and Punishment," his literary career was a desperate struggle with Russian public opinion. The attitude of the two writers toward literature was fundamentally different. From his youth up, Tolstoi, never having known what it was to be in want or to work for a living, has shrugged his shoulders scornfully at the notion that the true artists can work for money. One can recognize the prejudices of the old-fashioned country squire in the contempt for men who depend upon the pen for a livelihood. As men possessed of the old pride of gentle birth thought it degrading to earn their bread by manual labor, so Tolstoi deems it derogatory to take pay for intellectual work. Dostoievski, on the other hand, was never ashamed to toil for money like a plain journeyman. He used to speak of himself as a "post-hack." On one occasion he wrote against time three and a half printed newspaper pages in two days and two nights. "I have never sold," he wrote, "any of my books without getting the price down beforehand. I am a literary proletarian, and, if anybody wants my work he must insure me by prepayment."

Comparing the two novelists from the æsthetic point of view, our author assigns much the higher place to Dostoievski, on the score of catholicity, of comprehension and taste. Dostoievski, himself, used to say that he had two countries, Russia and Europe: in the book before us he is pronounced as, next to Pushkin, "the most Russian of Russian authors, and, at the same time, the greatest of our cosmopolitans." Tolstoi, on the other hand, although himself an artist of European celebrity, and himself deeply characteristic of Russian nature, is not credited with the capacity for fully absorbing universal culture which distinguished his rival. In spite of all his calculated and supposedly Christian cosmopolitanism, there is not, in Merejkowski's opinion, another great Russian writer so hampered as is Tolstoi in his creative power by conditions of place and time and the limits of his own nationality. We know, for instance, that in his youth he was in Italy, but he brought thence no impressions: we should never know from his writings that he had ever crossed the Alps. It is not denied that the creator of "Peace and War" had, when he wrote that work, an intellectual appreciation of history, but it is contended that he never penetrated, or thought it worth while to penetrate, by means of the imagination, into the spiritual life of other ages and other nations. His only interests are contemporary national activities—those of the Russian working class and those of the Russian gentlemen. From his youth Tolstoi's æsthetic sympathies seem to have been narrow. Merejkowski denounces the "childish blasphemies" which Tolstoi heaps upon fames undisputed and ancient. To Tolstoi, for example, "Faust" is counterfeit coin because it is too artistic and artificial. The love tales of Boccaccio he regards from an ascetically Christian standpoint as "a mass of sexual nastiness." The creations of Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Dante, Milton and Shakespeare, the music of Wagner and of Beethoven's later period, Tolstoi first calls "calculated and unspontaneous," and, later, "coarse, savage and often senseless." During a performance of "Hamlet," he experienced, he tells us, "that particular *malaise* which meretricious works produce." Merejkowski is disposed to compare the parader of such heresies to some savage Caliban shattering Ægina marbles, or to Herostratus, the Ephesian, who burnt the temple of Diana merely to gain notoriety. On the other hand, the same Tolstoi, who raises his hand against Æschylus and Dante, and to whom Pushkin is, if not "a schoolbook in a yellow cover," yet a dissipated man who wrote improver love verses, bows down in simplicity before Berthold Auerbach, George Eliot and "Uncle Tom's Cabin." Merejkowski is convinced that, in his *conscious* judgments on branches of art that are strange to him, Tolstoi at the closing of his days has not gone far from his first youth, when he studied with enthusiasm Dumas, Eugene Sue and Paul de Kock. "More deplorable still, from under the dread mask of Caliban peeps out the familiar and by no means awe-inspiring physiognomy of the Russian democratic squire, the gentleman-positivist of the sixties."

Dostoievski's mind, on the other hand, was hospitable to all the ancient and modern literatures of Europe. Not only did he appreciate Shakespeare, Schiller and all the great representatives of Romanticism, but he could also value highly the great French classics of the seventeenth century, Corneille and Racine, whom, in his boyhood, it was fashionable to regard with disdain. This son of a pauper-hospital surgeon, while acknowledging the inward artificiality and imitativeness of the French classics, revelled in the completeness and rounded harmony of form exemplified in the court poets of Louis XIV.

From the moral point of view the two writers cannot be compared. Merejkowski holds that Tolstoi, although he himself in his "Confession" denounces some of his own acts because they were not animated by Christian intentions, has really nothing to hide: "There is nothing for him to be ashamed of—all is pure, all innocent, as the nakedness of a child." Nobody would pretend that so much can be said for Dostoievski. Although biographies may try to palliate or explain away the disclosures in his "Notes From Underground," it is manifest that the dark side of his life was not edifying. The profound difference in their personal experiences seems to be reflected in the faces of Tolstoi, who is here described as the lord of the present, and of Dostoievski, who is commended to the future for the full measure of his fame. "Tolstoi's traits," says Merejkowski, "are those of a man who has lived long and grandly, perhaps stormily, rarely happily. The face of Nimrod, mighty hunter before the Lord, in spite of the wrinkles of seventy, it is full of unfading youth, freshness and somewhat haughty frigidity." Beside it our author places the face of Dostoievski, "never young, even in youth, shadowed by suffering, and the cheeks sunken. The huge, bare brow, bespeaking the clearness and majesty of reason; the piteous lips, twisted as if by the spasm of the 'sacred sickness;' the gaze dim and inexpressively heavy, as if turned inward; the slight cast in the eyes, as of one possessed. What is most painful in this face is a sort of immobility in the midst of movement, an endeavor arrested and turned to stone at the height of effort." M. W. H.

Timmins and Patty and Senator Knight.

Mrs. Sarah P. McL. Greene's story, "Winslow Plain" (Harper & Bros.), purports to be told by a historian who was once "Little Timothy" or "Timmins." As a child, tortured by tight shoes worn on stockingless feet, and suppressed by influences other than his shoes, he found comfort and encouragement in his Sunday school teacher, Patty Haskell. Patty once held him in her lap while the class recited its lesson and sang "Where, Oh, Where, is the Good Elijah?" He was 8 years old at that time. He has recorded: "I do not know whether my wife will ever read this book, for she belongs to several clubs of heavy study and disdains easy literature; but if she ever does so she must face the statement which a sacred memory compels me to make here, that never have I been committed so wholly, so youthfully, so transcendently to bliss as in that hour when I sat encircled by Patience Haskell's arm, with my head pillowed on her bosom."

When school was out she took him home to dinner with her, and after dinner encouraged him to climb a loaded cherry tree. He records an act of his after he had surfeited himself and while he was still in the tree. He says: "I grinned triumphantly, and *made a face*, boldly, saucily, *at the meeting house steeple!*" The italics and the exclamation mark which he here employs indicate the intensity of his opinion

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